

# Chapter 1

## Anyone Can Be Happy

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Experiencing happiness anywhere
  - ▶ Meeting some happy people
  - ▶ Calculating your happiness quotient
  - ▶ Benefiting from positive emotions
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**W**hat do children in an Israeli kibbutz, students at the College of William and Mary, and preliterate tribesmen in the wilds of Borneo share in common? Not their language or customs. It's their innate ability to experience happiness. Nowhere on this planet is there a group of human beings who lack the capacity for joy, satisfaction, peace of mind, and well-being.

Unlike its counterparts — anger, sadness, and fear — happiness is a *positive* emotion. Happiness is the glue that binds us all together and underlies all forms of civilized behavior. Happy employees are more productive. Happy couples have more enjoyable sex. Happy children make good students. Just as anger repulses people, happiness attracts. Happy people enjoy more support from those around them and are more sought after in social situations. Happiness offsets the burdens of everyday life and can be a healing force for the injured and infirm.

In this chapter, I fill you in on the many benefits that come from positive emotions and show you how to assess how happy you are at any point in life. I show you that it's possible to be happy no matter what your social and economic circumstances. And I introduce you to four people whose stories illustrate some key ingredients to how you can go about achieving happiness.

## *Happiness: The Universal Emotion*

Happiness is everywhere — in every country, culture, big city, jungle, canyon, and apartment building in the world, anywhere that human beings reside. Thus, happiness — along with anger, curiosity, fear, disgust, and sadness — is considered a universal emotion.

Psychologist Paul Ekman, professor emeritus at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco, spent his entire 40-year career circumnavigating the globe, and everywhere he went he found the same smiling faces. His research pointed the way to our understanding that emotions are not learned behaviors — we're born with them. What you *can* learn, however, are ways of accessing happiness.



Find a quiet spot somewhere — your favorite coffee shop, the YMCA, your local shopping mall, a park bench — and, like Dr. Ekman, observe the faces of people around you. Count how many smiling faces you see in a period of 30 minutes. You'll probably find that there's a lot more happiness in the world than you imagined.

## *Happiness from the Individual Perspective*

Other people are the best teachers, no matter what you're trying to learn. So, if you want to know how to be happy, what better way to start than by asking people who show happiness more than most people?

I interviewed four people whose stories are not only interesting but instructive. Here's what they had to say:

✓ **Diane** is a 64-year old grandmother of eight. She's what's known as a "mover-shaker" in the real-estate business, a very successful woman, who has an infectious laugh and looks much younger than her age. Diane has had, in her words, "a blessed life," and her only major current stress is caring for an aging parent. She attends church regularly and has for most of her life. On a happiness scale from 1 to 10, Diane rates herself "at least 9" and she believes that people who know her would give her that same score. I asked Diane what the secret to her happiness is, and she said:

That's easy. I had happy parents. We didn't have a lot of money, but they managed to make me feel special and a very important part of their lives. They were very positive about whatever I wanted to do when I was growing up. And, most important, they showed me I had a choice about how to see life — if you look for the positive, you'll find it. And the same goes if you're always looking for the negative.

That positive outlook Diane learned from her parents has served her well in her business. As she put it, "In real estate, looking for the positive helps when you have to deal with difficult people and I think it makes it easier for me to find solutions to problems."

- ✓ **Lanny** is 74 and widowed. He has one grown daughter and two grandkids, who are the joy of his life. Lanny retired after a long and very successful career as a stock broker, and now he spends a lot of his time doing volunteer work for various community agencies. He believes it's important to give back some of the good fortune he's accumulated throughout his life. Lanny also attends church regularly.

At the time I interviewed Lanny, there were no significant stresses in his life, but there had been in the past — the deaths of four siblings, his parents, and his wife, all as a result of severe and lingering illness. Still, on that 1-to-10 happiness scale, Lanny rates himself a 10. He believes it's important to look for opportunities to be happy and to work hard to achieve that end. His motto: "Only *you* can make it happen!"

Like Diane, Lanny doesn't look his age — he says, "I don't frown and have wrinkles, so most people think I'm younger than I am!" He also believes that happiness has had a lot to do with the fact that he's rarely been ill throughout his life. Lanny says he owes much of his ability to be happy to his mother, who from the outset taught him to "go to bed every night thinking about something positive you did today." He begins the day the same way, thinking about "someone I want to see today who means a lot to me" — this sets the emotional tone for his day. Lanny also makes a point of repeating to himself, both silently and aloud, "Life is good!", which keeps him focused on the positives in the world around him. Finally, he thanks people he encounters for "sharing their smile" with him, which they're glad to do.

- ✓ **Janine** is 56, has two grown sons, and is happily married. She spends much of her time lately doing volunteer work, which she describes as both a joy and a hassle, depending on which day you ask her. She attends religious services regularly. And you'd never guess it from her happy demeanor, but Janine has long suffered from chronic depression. Interestingly, part of her success in managing her depression comes as a result of her attempts to "keep others happy" — their happiness then bounces back on her and "helps me get through difficult times."

What's her recipe for happiness? She says, "My mother taught me that 'pretty is as pretty does' — in other words, a smile is more becoming than a snarl." Her mother also taught her to "not say anything about someone if you can't be nice," which remains a guiding principle in Janine's life. Her mother was a strong role model, a self-made woman with a generous spirit. Janine feels that happiness is a gift from her mother — a talent — that she, in turn, must share with the world. On the happiness scale, she rates herself a definite 9!

- ✓ **Cecil** is 60 and still actively employed in the insurance business, a profession he has succeeded at since high school when he began shadowing his father, who was also an insurance agent. He's married to the same sweet woman he met decades ago, whom he credits with being a major influence in his ability to be perpetually happy — "She pulls me up in life and always has." She's also taught Cecil to "loosen up" and enjoy life — and, be the type of person who always sees the glass half-full.

Cecil had a childhood illness that left him disabled, and he learned early on that humor defuses the awkwardness that often arises when you have a handicap. He attends church regularly and also looks much younger than his age. Cecil believes that happiness is crucial to good health — “At my age, I think it’s remarkable that I don’t take any prescription drugs.” Laughter is Cecil’s medication to be sure. He is legendary when it comes to telling jokes; as a close friend once said, “It’s impossible to tell a joke that Cecil hasn’t already told.” He believes that happiness is contagious and he’s apparently doing his best to infect the world around him.

Each of these people is unique in his or her own way, but there are some commonalities to their happy stories:

- ✓ They all attribute much of their happiness to the influences of significant others in their lives (parents, life partners).
- ✓ They all profess a belief that happiness is something you have to work for — you have to find it, it doesn’t come looking for you.
- ✓ They all believe it’s possible to be happy even when life doesn’t always go the way you want it to (for example, when dealing with aging parents, coping with depression, or grieving the loss of loved ones to debilitating illnesses).
- ✓ They all believe in a higher power and practice their religion, and they think that helps them have a positive outlook on life.
- ✓ They all believe in beginning and ending the day with positive thoughts that lend themselves to happiness.
- ✓ They all believe that happiness insures good health and keeps you looking young.
- ✓ They all believe that happiness is something that increases with age (see the following section).



Talk to a happy person you know and see if you can find out what his secret to happiness is. If you’re like me, you’ll be surprised at how willing he is to talk about why he’s happy, who in his life enabled him to feel this way, and what he sees as the benefits that come from always being positive.

## *The Demographics of Happiness*

Happiness is a very democratic emotion — it isn’t an emotion that’s available to only a certain group of individuals and not others. But there *are* some demographic characteristics that increase your chances of being happy. I cover these in the following sections.

## The happiest country in the world

Finland is purportedly the happiest country in the world. Their secret, so say the Finns, is that they're a culture of modest expectations. As a people, they want less out of life and are satisfied with what they have. Finland has a shortage of workaholics and there is little disparity

as far as wealth goes. They don't suffer from all the social pressures and violence that typify most industrialized countries. They find a certain comfort in their collective humility — when it comes to materialism, they're content being the underdog.

## Age

Age seems to increase a person's overall likelihood of being happy. If you think that young people have the advantage here, you're wrong. Most young people are happy to be sure, but research shows that you're much *more* likely to experience happiness the older you get. In one survey, 38 percent of respondents aged 68 to 77 reported feeling "very happy" as compared to only 28 percent of respondents between the ages of 18 and 27. This same survey showed a sharp increase in happiness scores beginning at age 45 and continuing into the mid-70s. (There was a similar decline in negative emotions with age.)

So, why do people tend to get happier as they get older?

- ✔ **Older people have reached a point of *satiation* in life.** They've had a sufficient amount of success and positive experiences to feel both grateful and content. Younger people are on the way, but they're not there yet.
- ✔ **Age alters a person's expectations.** Somewhere along the way, you realize that you don't get everything you want out of life and that life never was meant to be perfect. I tell people all the time, "If you want to be happy, you don't have to like the way life is — you just have to accept that it is that way."
- ✔ **With age comes *wisdom* — a perspective that results from a combination of accumulated worldly experience and knowledge — not often seen as people muddle through the first half of life.**

It's no coincidence that the people I interviewed (see the preceding section) were all between the ages 56 and 74.

## Marital status

Marriage also seems to make a difference in people's happiness. Married people, generally speaking, are happier than those who are unmarried. This is true for both men and women. Marriage is one of the meaningful social

ties I talk about in Chapter 16. Marriage brings coherence to people's lives (Chapter 10), gives them an opportunity to be less selfish (Chapter 17), and allows them to tend and befriend those they love (Chapter 20).



Although most of the research looks at happiness in married people, I think it's fair to say that these same benefits would accrue from other types of committed, long-term relationships as well.



Not all partnerships are happy. In Chapter 20, I point out the aspects of an intimate relationship that make for a happy couple. These include

- ✓ Understanding that being in an intimate relationship means being your partner's companion
- ✓ Creating a sense of equity and parity in the relationship
- ✓ Sharing interests, passion, and intimacy
- ✓ Avoiding contempt even when angry
- ✓ Practicing empathy
- ✓ Saying the magic words: "I am sorry."

## *Education level*

The more education you have, the happier you're likely to be. This may be an indirect effect of the positive relationship that education has on a person's earning power, health, ability to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday life, and longevity. In short, education doesn't guarantee that you'll be happy, but it sure does increase your odds.



Sign up for a class or two at your local community college. Trust me, you'll be happy you did.

## *Happiness at Each Stage of Self-Actualization*

According to psychologist Abraham Maslow, a forerunner of the positive psychology movement, if you're self-confident (as opposed to self-centered), enjoy solitude, have a need to serve the greater good, have a keen sense of humor, and aren't afraid to be creative and unique in how you approach life, you're a self-actualized person. Maslow said that happiness comes from satisfying a *hierarchy of needs* in an orderly manner. He argued that you experience happiness at each of five levels of self-actualization:

- ✓ **Level I:** The first level of self-actualization has to do with meeting your basic survival needs — air, water, food, and sleep. At this level, happiness is more about having something to eat than it is about tender, loving care.
- ✓ **Level II:** The second level of self-actualization has to do with safety and can include everything from a safe neighborhood to a financial safety net that comes from having a supportive family or by working hard to put aside money for your retirement years.
- ✓ **Level III:** The next level involves a sense of belonging — that is, feeling loved and needed by others.
- ✓ **Level IV:** The fourth level has to do with self-esteem. Do you feel like you're respected and appreciated by others? Do you like and respect yourself?
- ✓ **Level V:** The final level Maslow calls self-actualization. In essence, you're there, you've arrived, you've reached your full potential, and you are your happiest, most unique, most creative self. Classic examples of self-actualized people include Thomas Jefferson, Florence Nightingale, Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Mother Teresa.

Having satisfied each level of need/motivation, you then move on to the next all the way to the “peak” of what life has to offer.

So, ask yourself: How satisfied am I as far as biological needs, safety, love, self-esteem, and creativity goes? You may be more self-actualized than you know.

## *Looking at the Benefit of Positive Emotions*

Only in recent years have psychologists begun to appreciate the benefits of positive emotion — benefits that include everything from enhanced creativity to improved immune-system function. Dr. Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina, a leader in the field of positive psychology, posed the question, “What good are positive emotions?” and came up with the following possibilities.

### *Broadening your focus and expanding your thinking*

Positive emotions — curiosity, love, joy, contentment, wonder, excitement — expand your focus of attention. When you're angry, your focus narrows to the source of your frustration and the object of your wrath. Your mind is like a heat-seeking missile, bent on destruction.

Contrast this with what happens when you get excited about something — your mind opens up and there's a free flow of ideas and intellectual possibility. Curiosity abounds. This is precisely why passion is so essential to artistic endeavors. This is also why you need a high positivity ratio in the workplace (see Chapter 18) if you want a high rate of productivity and a healthy bottom line. In short, your brain works best when it's high on happiness.



Dr. Fredrickson likens the cognitive changes that accompany positive emotion to a state of mania (great excitement), only in this case not the kind of mania that requires medical treatment.

All four of the happy people I introduce in “Happiness from the Individual Perspective,” earlier in this chapter, also enjoyed success in their respective careers. When I talked to them, I could hear the excitement and passion in their voices, whether we were discussing the challenges of dealing with difficult clients in the real-estate business or how to thrive in the insurance industry. And that passion had obviously not diminished despite their age.

Psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School teaches his patients the art of *mindfulness meditation* — a Buddhist meditation exercise — as a means of expanding their awareness of those things they fear most, for example, chronic pain and depression. He has patients relax their bodies while at the same time opening up their minds. The irony here is that the more clearly you think about your pain, the less it distresses you. (If you'd like to try meditation, but you're not sure where to start, check out *Meditation For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, by Stephan Bodian [Wiley]. It includes a CD of guided meditation exercises.)



When Kabat-Zinn and others studied the brain activity that accompanies this type of meditation, they found that it was the left frontal lobe of the brain that was literally turned on — the part that scientists refer to as the “happy brain.”

## Endorphins: The link between happiness and pain relief

The same chemicals that facilitate pain relief — often referred to as the body's own painkillers — also underlie feelings of pleasure, joy, and contentment. Those chemicals are called *endorphins*, and they have an opiate-like effect on a person's mental and emotional states. The so-called “runner's high” is an example of endorphins at work, suppressing the pain that

would naturally come from long-distance running. In addition to exercise, activities that turn the brain on to endorphins include all forms of creative activity, competitive pursuits (as long as you don't get angry), fellowship with others, prayer, healthy sexual encounters, and being surrounded by things of beauty.



## *Improving your ability to problem-solve*

Psychiatrist Avery Weisman, in his wonderful book *The Coping Capacity* (Human Sciences Press), lists 15 commonly used coping strategies, including “Laugh it off — change the emotional tone.” That’s right, when you’re frustrated and you’re having trouble solving some problem that confronts you, what you need is a good laugh. Laughter unfreezes a “stuck” brain. Think of humor as a lubricant that allows the wheels — your thought processes — to once again move toward a solution. The mechanism that underlies effective problem-solving is creativity, which is your brain’s ability to come up with novel, unique answers to life’s many challenges.

In the ten years that I ran an outpatient rehabilitation program for chronic-pain sufferers, one of the things that made our program more effective than most medically oriented programs was the fact that we went out of our way to create a positive environment for our clients. The four-hour-a-day, five-week experience we offered our clients was about much more than shots and pills. Getting people who experience pain 24/7 to lighten up and laugh is no easy task, I can assure you. But, in the end, I’m convinced that laughter is the best painkiller on the market. Typically, within only a couple of days, strangers whose only common link was their ongoing pain began to smile, giggle, tease one another, and, for the first time in years, exhibit a sense of hope and optimism. Suddenly, those who had steadfastly resisted engaging in any type of physical reconditioning were willing to tackle the treadmill, floor exercises, and exercise bike. In group discussions, patients were able to come up with creative solutions of how to live with pain — whereas before they could only envision a lifetime of misery and disability. They began to move about more freely — walking faster, limping less, and showing more signs of stamina. Pain management was now a possibility that they embraced rather than ran from.

## *Building physical, intellectual, and social resources*

Positive emotions build the following resources:

- ✓ **Physical resources:** People are more playful when they’re happy — they’re interested in golf, tennis, marathon running, pick-up basketball games, adult softball leagues, scuba-diving, and water-skiing. Happy people are more likely to exercise on a regular basis. Part of this comes from the higher self-esteem seen in happy people. In short, happiness translates into physical fitness — stronger muscles, improved heart-lung function, and increased flexibility.



This relationship between happiness and physical resources explains, in large part, why the Baby Boomer generation is expected to live longer and healthier than preceding generations — as a group, they’ve been happier and more physically active throughout their lives and they have no intention of changing any of that even after retirement.

The next time you feel really happy, think about signing up at a local gym. That’s where all the other happy people are!

- ✓ **Intellectual resources:** People learn better when they’re in a positive frame of mind.

I once attended a workshop conducted by Patch Adams, the controversial physician who believes that positive emotions have the power to heal. What was unusual about this workshop was having my nose painted red by one of his assistants — who was dressed as a clown — at the beginning of the afternoon seminar. He didn’t ask my permission — he just did it! And, you know what? The workshop was one of the best learning experiences of my entire professional life — I looked silly as hell, but I sure learned a lot. There’s something about humility that opens the mind, relaxes the body, and makes the brain more receptive to incoming information.

The most effective schoolteachers are the ones who find ways to make education enjoyable — laughter makes kids pay attention and attention is the key to learning. The same is true when you go to a continuing education experience; you want a speaker who is not only knowledgeable about his subject matter, but who can be entertaining.



I tell my students at the community college to do something for fun before they sit down to study for a test and they’ll get a better grade. If you engage in a fun activity first, your brain will be like a happy sponge and absorb all that material.

- ✓ **Social resources:** Human beings gravitate toward positive people and away from negative ones.



Think about the biblical prescription, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and decide how you want to be treated. If you want to be treated badly, then by all means act badly toward others. However, if you want people to smile at you, you need to greet them with cheer and influence their lives in some positive way. More often than not, this is what you’ll get in return.

## *Counteracting negative emotions*

Happiness is one antidote to rage. Optimism can be an antidote to fear and cynicism. Joy is the opposite of misery. Humor defuses a desire for vengeance. Positive and negative emotions can’t exist at the same moment in time. Embracing one negates the other.

Once when I was being treated for depression, I was fussing about things I thought my family had done to agitate me, when my therapist interrupted to ask, “Do you love your wife?” Without hesitation, I said, “Of course, I do.” He then told me to continue ranting and raving about my family, but I couldn’t. My head wanted to, but my heart was no longer in it — it happened just that fast. Whenever I find myself getting angry at the people closest to me, I ask myself that same question, “Do I love this person?” and the anger disappears.



The next time you find yourself feeling negative — upset, angry, sad — try replacing that with a positive feeling and see what happens. Think about someone who makes you laugh, something that excites you, some activity that pleases you — it may provide just the escape you need from those negative emotions.

## *Protecting your health*

You probably already know that getting upset or angry can raise your blood pressure and, in the worst-case scenario, precipitate a heart attack or stroke. But did you know that positive emotions can lower your blood pressure and risk for cardiovascular disease? Well, they can.

The pioneering work of Dr. Barbara Fredrickson illustrated that when stressed people watched a film that left them feeling amused and content, that led to quicker recovery of heart function. She also noted that stressed subjects who smiled while watching a sad movie had a more rapid heart rate recovery than those who didn’t smile. Her thesis is that positive emotions *undo* the effects of stress and, therefore, protect a person’s health over the long run.

## **The wrong time to be happy**

There is one situation in which happiness doesn’t pay — it’s when you’re trying to negotiate a resolution to some type of conflict or bargain with someone. If the opposing party sees that you’re in a good mood, he’s more likely to have a longer list of demands.

Research shows that parties concede more to an angry opponent than a happy one. So, if you want to strike a good deal, wipe that smile off your face and replace it with a frown — even if you don’t feel all that negative. It’s just good business!

Happiness detracts from the impression that you’re a tough negotiator. It also implies that, no matter what you say, you’ll be satisfied with whatever the last offer was. It encourages others to hold the line on what they’re willing to give you. So, the next time you go to buy a car or a new house — where negotiation is expected — put on your serious face. You can smile after the deal is done.

Other studies have shown that something as simple as getting a light touch on your hand from a compassionate friend or the act of petting your favorite animal can also lower your blood pressure — and, neither requires a prescription, gets you into a hassle with your insurance carrier, or has negative side-effects.

## *Achieving Happiness Isn't Always Easy*

You'd think it would be easy to be happy, but that's not always the case. You have to be aware. You can't be in a hurry. And you have to welcome the experience. In the following sections, I show you how.

### *Being mindful*

Mindfulness is about paying attention. Being mindful requires that you stay in the present moment — the here and now — which isn't easy for folks whose minds are always dwelling on the past or skipping ahead to the future. If you're paying attention to the world around you, then you're said to be “mindful of your surroundings.” In the case of emotions like happiness, mindfulness has to do with being acutely aware of your inner feelings — something most people don't do enough of.

Being mindful requires that you be able to focus your thoughts on one thing — how you feel — and nothing else. For some people, this is more difficult than it sounds. Often, for example, when I ask male clients how they feel about something, they answer by telling me what they *think* or what they *did*. They're simply not used to thinking in emotional terms. In the more extreme case, I end up saying, “Look, I don't care what you thought or what you did. I just want to know how you felt at the time — you know, like mad, sad, or glad. Which were you?”

Being mindful requires that you not critique, censor, or judge whatever it is that you're focusing your attention on. There is no right or wrong to how you feel. If you feel happy, that's okay — if not, that's okay, too.



You may be happier than you realize because you're not paying attention. Your mind is always somewhere else — worrying about this or that, checking things off the never-ending to-do list, and so forth. If you stop for a minute to reflect — be mindful — you may be surprised at how good you feel.

### *Lingering in the moment*

The dictionary defines *lingering* as “remaining in a place longer than usual or longer than expected.” Lingering is, in effect, a measure of time — in this case, taking time to enjoy a moment of happiness. Hurrying is just the

opposite. When you hurry, you quickly jump from one experience or task to another. You tell yourself you don't have time to stay with any one thing too long. Always moving forward, always too much left to accomplish.

In Chapter 15, I talk about some of the differences between Type A and Type B personalities and how this impacts the balance between work and play. Type A's hurry; Type B's tend to linger.

Kristin, a highly intelligent 30-year old, single woman, was very accomplished but also very unhappy. She was a workaholic, putting in at least 10 to 12 hours at the office each day. If there was a task to be done, Kristin was the one to do it — definitely a Type A! When I asked her to tell me about her feelings, she angrily replied,

Dr. Gentry, I don't have time to have feelings — I'm too damned busy. The people who work under me, now *they* all have feelings. They're always mad about something or upset because of this or that, which, believe me, gets in the way of their work. So, when you ask me how I feel, the honest answer is, "I don't have a clue."

When I finally succeeded in helping Kristin explore her feelings, she became painfully aware of just how sad, depressed, anxious, and defeated she felt most days. (Sometimes, in counseling, people end up feeling worse before they feel better.) This then begged the question: "Is this how you want to feel at work for the next 30 years, or would you like instead to enjoy your job and be happy with what you've accomplished?" I'm happy to say that Kristin chose the latter.

Bottom line: Some people allow time in their busy day for a few moments of happiness, and others don't. Which kind of person are you?

## *Being happy about being happy*

Some people just have a hard time letting themselves be happy. Take Rod, for example. He wants to be happy — he really does — but as soon as he finds himself enjoying life, he gets anxious. Deep down in his subconscious, Rod knows two things for certain:

- ✓ The minute he lets himself feel the least bit happy, something will come along and screw it up.
- ✓ For some reason, he doesn't deserve to be happy.

Where in the world did Rod get these screwy ideas? The answer is: He got them by being raised in an alcoholic home by parents who were emotionally unstable, unpredictable, and at times violent. Rod and his brothers could be playing happily one minute and the next minute all hell would break loose

and somebody would end up hurt. “It was like you were afraid to let yourself relax and enjoy what you were doing because any second everything went from harmony to chaos,” he said. Thirty-five years later, Rod is still afraid, always waiting for the other shoe to drop. Without realizing it, Rod is being self-protective. The logic is simple: You can’t lose what you never had.

And why exactly does Rod feel like he doesn’t deserve to be happy? Because the child in him — that part of his personality that never really grew up — thinks like all children that “if my parents are angry or unhappy, it must be because I did something wrong.” Because the child did something wrong, he deserves to be punished. And what better punishment is there than a lifetime of unhappiness?



When you find yourself in a happy moment, does a little voice in the back of your head whisper, “Be careful, don’t let your guard down — you don’t deserve this”? If so, you may want to consider seeing a mental-health professional — part of a mental-health professional’s job is to help people quiet those lingering childlike voices that often get in the way of people’s adult lives.

## Timing is everything

Maybe happiness is meant to be the *exception* rather than the *rule*. If you’re happy too much of the time, you might get too comfortable — too complacent — with the way things are and not want to change anything. For example, if people had been happy having to light their homes with candles, we wouldn’t have needed Thomas Edison to come along and invent the electric light bulb. If in the Old West, people had been happy with the Pony Express as the major communication link between east and west, we wouldn’t have needed the telegraph, telephone, and eventual global telecommunication networks. If Americans had been happy using horses to plow their fields and take them into town, Henry Ford would never have brought us tractors and automobiles.

This could also explain why people tend to be happier as they grow older. Maybe it makes

sense that young people are more frustrated, angrier, and more restless about life — these feelings provide the energy necessary to make things happen in terms of productivity, entrepreneurship, creativity, and invention.

What I’m suggesting is that perhaps happiness is wasted on the young and is an emotion better suited to people in the second half of life. Why else would 38 percent of people between the ages of 68 and 77 report being “very happy” as compared to only 28 percent of those between 18 and 27?

Look on the bright side: If you’re under age 40, you have something to look forward to — a happier time of life. If you’re over 40, good news: You’re already well on your way to compounding a life of happiness.

## How Happy Are You?

Nearly everybody is happy at one time or another. Happiness, like all emotions — anger, pain, sadness — is a subjective experience, which means only *you* know how happy you are. On a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 is not at all happy and 10 is the height of happiness), where are you right now? Divide that number by 10 (so if you said 6, divide 6 by 10, and you get 0.6, or 60 percent) to get your happiness quotient (HQ).



Happiness scores tend to be skewed toward the positive end, which means that the average person either is typically somewhere between 5 and 10 in terms of how positive he feels or he doesn't want anyone to think he's unhappy — probably a little of both.

If your rating HQ is 50 percent or below, you're less happy than most people. If you scored 10 percent, 20 percent, or 30 percent, you're basically saying you're *unhappy*. If your current HQ is 80 percent, 90 percent, or 100 percent, you're doing something right!



Happiness scores fluctuate — more in some people than in others. Some people are consistently on the high end of the curve; others are typically on the low end. To track your HQ scores over time, rate yourself at the same time every day for 30 days. Make a few notations each day alongside your score so that, when you're finished, you can go back and compare what was happening in your life on those days when you were the happiest versus those when you weren't. Think of it as a *happiness log*.

